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## Light: Journey of a Lifetime

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Light:  
Journey of a Lifetime

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
In  
The Department of Film, Theater, and Communication Arts

by

Kiren G. Kaimal

B.A., Dartmouth College, 2000

May, 2008

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## Acknowledgments

As it has been said a thousand times before, the making of a film is a collaborative process. One cannot succeed without the contributions of a myriad of people. A similar analogy could be made with the film school experience. Without the contributions of many, I would not have had such an excellent film school education.

I would first like to thank my thesis committee chairman, John McGowann-Hartmann, who has been helpful throughout my thesis process. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Steve Hank and Michelle Benoit. While I haven't had to the pleasure of taking a class with Prof. Hank until this, my last semester, Ms. Benoit has been a crucial figure in my film school education. She has taught me the importance of character and story development as well as the best ways to use both to great effect.

Hamp Overton was my first production professor, and he taught me the basics (i.e. you can't film without light and the lens should be pointed at what you want to shoot—surprisingly, I needed to be taught these things!). Rob Racine taught me the technical aspects of post-production— I wish I could have been more receptive to his sage advice (try as he did, he could not make me a technophile).

I would also like to thank my mother and my father for supporting my ambitions and dreams to become a film director. It can't have been easy for them to let me abandon the path towards medical school, but they did so with great love and support.

I also want to heartily thank those who helped me in India, specifically my uncle, P. Madhava Kaimal. He put me in touch with the essential contacts I used to make my short film, Light. They include the venerable Kerala director, Viji Thampi, and the cast

and crew of Light including my close collaborators, Sujith Vasudev, Anzar Khan, Sabu Ram, and Roji Roberts.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to those I've worked with during my years in film school, my fellow students and all the actors who have taught me more about being a director than I could have ever hoped or dreamed.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis covers the lessons I've learned throughout film school and how I have applied them towards the making of my thesis film, the 12-minute narrative short, Light, shot on digital video. Every aspect of the filmmaking process is covered including my education at UNO and its application to my thesis. Areas covered include the writing process, pre-production, production, and post-production. The one area that is omitted is distribution, something that was not taught at UNO and something that I am in the process of doing.

Keywords: Film Production MFA Short Film India Kerala

## Introduction

### Why Film School?

Tulane University: As my classes wound down in the Pharmacology Department, the questions started to creep up. What are the next steps? The answers were pretty obvious. Apply to med school. Take the MCAT. Wait for interviews.

It was during this waiting process that the panic attacks started. I was looking down the barrel of ten years to becoming a full-fledged specialist. No big deal. This is what I wanted, right? But ten years was a long time to realize at the end of it, I made a mistake. Don't get me wrong. This was probably a mistake that I could live with; after all, six figures would give me some comfort while I freaked out about wasting my life. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was doing the wrong thing. My gut was telling me that I was in the process of doing something that I would regret my entire life.

Alexandria Senior High. I was lucky enough to go to high school during the pivotal moments in the Gen-X 90's. My idols were the Kurts: Kurt Cobain and Kurt Vonnegut. I even dressed in the faded cardigans and considered dyeing my hair purple (it would never have worked; my hair was very thick and very black). While my musical and literary mindsets were ever expanding, I saw a movie that very well might have changed the course of my life: A Clockwork Orange.

Before then, I never really gave much thought to movies; other than as a simple escape -- an opportunity to munch on popcorn, sit in a darkened room for two hours, and be entertained. A Clockwork Orange didn't entertain me but



rather shook the very foundations of what I thought film to be. I didn't know who Stanley Kubrick was and never heard of 2001: A Space Odyssey at that time. But I started to realize the possibilities that film had beyond simple entertainment. In the same way Kurt Cobain was speaking to my teenage angst and helping me to deal with being a teenager emotionally, A Clockwork Orange spoke to my teenage intellect. But even more than that, I quickly responded to Kubrick's technical brilliance. I loved his use of quick zooms (something I'm only getting over now), slow motion, dolly shots, and editing style.

I started to voraciously dive into the filmographies of not just Kubrick, but other masters. Spielberg, Scorsese, Hitchcock. Of course, the directors I could get hold of had to be at my local blockbuster. Yet I was still a bona fide film buff. Of course, at this time, it was just a hobby, right? What else could anyone do but watch films? Anyway, I still had four years of high school left, and the path to medicine was pretty clear. Do well in school, get into a good college, and then get into medical school.

Dartmouth College. As I walked through the crowded auditorium, I saw endless booths advertising activities I had no interest for. "Join Darcorps and pick up trash along the Connecticut River!" Was I truly apathetic? But the booth for the Dartmouth Film Society made me stop. The commitment didn't seem too bad. After all, the most I had to do was watch movies. What happened next was certainly unexpected.

Being a part of the DFS drastically changed the way I thought about films. The best part of the organization was that it put up a film festival series every

trimester. Each series had a specific theme (Cinema Paranoia, Hard-boiled Movies, etc), and they were all shown with the original prints. Our benefactor was a man named Bill Pence who was well known in the film industry. He founded the Telluride Film Festival, and his contacts were endless. Through his contacts, the DFS had a decently reputable name. Every year, we awarded the Dartmouth Film Award, and our recipients have varied from Pedro Almodovar to Johnny Depp to Lillian Gish. When I was enrolled, I had the benefit of meeting Meryl Streep (who was awesome) and Oliver Stone (who was not).

I was surrounded by real cineastes who passionately discussed a wide range of movies. Through them and the various film series, I began my education of great American classics to the independent era of the 70's. I learned about the great foreign masters, Akira Kurosawa, Satyajit Ray, Ingmar Bergman, Luis Bunuel, Jean Renoir—the list became endless. I slowly rose up the ranks to become a directorate member, and my responsibilities included creating and voting on the various film series, and most importantly writing “notes,” which were essays handed out to the audience before the screening of the film in question. Members had to write “notes” every trimester.

From this avalanche of discovery, I found myself veering away from my premed subjects and looking at a variety of different classes. Though, at the time, I never had ambitions to become a film director; something that Kathleen Kennedy (please forgive the name-dropping) told me stuck, “The best education for a film director is a liberal arts education.” Somewhere, my subconscious took

that to heart. And upon graduating, I knew just about everything about film there was—except how to make one.

What would have been the course of events my life would have followed had I started making films at that age instead of just talking about them? Its one of those mysteries I'll never know; maybe I wouldn't have looked at my love of film as just a hobby. At the time, such questions didn't really matter; film wasn't practical, but the course I had originally set upon entering college was. I started taking premed classes post-baccalaureate and eventually studied for my master's degree in Pharmacology at Tulane.

The thing is, that mild interest, that hobby that I disregarded upon graduation, was slowly starting to fester in me. The closer I came to medical school, the more that seed of doubt became an obsession. It came to the point that I felt I had no choice. I made the decision to enter film school and three years later, here I am.

## Chapter I: What I Learned at Film School

### *I Know Nothing—Not a Newbie—Trial By Fires*

Having a passion for film and knowing how to make one are two completely different things. Sure, I had made some shorts on video, (which served as a meager portfolio for my application) but I used a camera and a tripod and nothing else. I didn't really understand how complicated making a film was.

In Hamp Overton's 4510 class (Film Production), I had never heard of flags, c-stands, scrims, juniors, tweenies... the whole thing was an overwhelming fog. Within the course of a couple weeks, we had to learn how to thread a camera with film and shoot a two-minute short with sync sound. It was trial by fire; it was sink or swim—I loved every second of it. I had had enough with theory, with film appreciation, I was getting my hands dirty and with every stress-filled moment (gee, I hope I didn't fog the film; my actor really sucks; I hope that the mixer is turned on) I felt myself really learning and learning exponentially. Someone can tell you about a c-stand or a scrim, but you never really know what one is until you smack your shins or burn your hands with one. On top of this, I joined the 2006 Spring Film Production class as DP a few weeks into the semester. (Someone had seen I'd taken Cinematography and asked me if I wanted the job. They apparently didn't know that I still had no idea what that was—but I instinctively said yes).

For a complete film production newbie, the 2006 Spring semester was an invaluable experience. 4510 and 4520 taught me how to craft a story with limited footage and resources while the myriad responsibilities as a Spring Film DP

taught me how to manage a fairly sizeable crew (and deal with the stress of having to be depended on). Midway through the semester, Prof. Overton gave me some more valuable advice: if I had time, I should work on every film project I could. Entering the 2006 Fall semester, the newbie title no longer applied to me. I was ready for the real meat of my film education.

As I slowly came to discover that the most effective method in learning to direct was to actually direct, I made this the focus of my second year in making films. While reviewing the FTCA course offerings, I reasoned that 4500 (Film Development and Planning) and 6251 (Seminar in Screenwriting) were the perfect venues to come with ideas for the films I planned on making.

The semester, while not as hectic as spring, was very significant in a variety of ways. The first was that it was a significant brainstorming session for the film that I was going to undertake for 2007 Spring. The second was that the origins of Light started. And the third was that I participated in the filming of Code 7. Code 7 was a film directed by Andrew Hutchings, which had a crew of over 60 people working on it. While I was a gaffer for the 9-day shoot, I got to see how a student project with 60 people worked. In any case, I began the pre-production of my own student film, Annie. Annie was the result of countless numbers of ideas that I pitched and that were ultimately shot down. There was significant pressure to find an idea and stick to it given the time restraints for pre-production in the 4500 class. It took me half the semester to find an idea that wasn't complete garbage. The lessons learned here were that good ideas are very hard to come by and that it's important to be able to judge your own work

with a very critical eye (as well as not take it so hard when your ideas are terrible).

While Annie was the only project planned when 2007 Spring began, I got a pleasant surprise when I found out that I was chosen to direct one of the 2007 Spring Film shorts, Circulation. All of a sudden I had two films in one semester that I was responsible for, one of my own making and one of a script that wasn't mine. While I was largely responsible for producing Annie, I had a great number of people to help put together Circulation. Annie was a small production with about 10 people on my crew and only three actors. I knew exactly the film I wanted to make, and the shooting went rather straightforward. The only times that I felt stressed were when I had to put on my producer's hat (I've since learned that I hate producing). Circulation was a different matter all together. The script for Circulation was very ambiguous and could be taken in a great many directions. I literally spent weeks trying to dissect and analyze it; trying to create shots that would be essential to the story. In other words, I didn't know what film I wanted to make. That confusion and indecision resulted in my creating over 80 shots for Circulation.

Very good actors worked on Annie and really made all the difference. Two weeks before shooting I had no actors. The first auditions proved fruitless, and if Annie didn't have good actors, I didn't see the point of continuing with the project. The second round of auditions had only a handful of actors, but I found great ones. Annie also had a small but fantastic crew. When the crew knows

their job and can do it efficiently, and your actors are good, the job of the director is very easy.

Circulation was a different story. Coming off Annie, I had a lot of confidence and knowledge as the director. Thankfully, my lead actress in Circulation was one of the actors in Annie, and I had some degree of comfort in having her on set. The crew that I worked with in Circulation was assigned (I had personally chosen the crew for Annie), and the feeling of close collaboration was missing. Also, the crew was large and unwieldy, and everyone there had the feeling that it was just a student film. The stakes were pretty low for most people. Yet, most people worked hard (if not always knowledgably). My shot list was way too ambitious and largely unnecessary. The crew was not able to work as fast as my needs, (after all, most were newbies like me a year ago) and this problem was compounded by both the perfectionist attitude of my DP (the cinematography was superb, though) and our failure to communicate effectively. In the end, between scenes I frantically cut out shots that I deemed were not absolutely germane to the story. Even then, when the shoot was over, I found myself lacking crucial shots. That first week of post-production was a rather dour one. The rough cut looked pretty awful, and my editor and I knew what shots were missing. Luckily, we were given the green light for re-shoots and after many weeks of editing (with lots of help from Rob Racine) we found the movie, a movie that I was finally happy with. Going into the fall with two solid films under my belt, I felt I had the necessary tools to make my film in India.

## Chapter II: The Writing Process

*God's Own Country—Dejection/Inspiration--I am not the Unabomber—2 hours can be 10 minutes*

Just as my desire to be a film director was slowly and subconsciously affecting my identity after high school, my identification with my cultural heritage had always, slowly and subtly defined who I was. The nexus of both influences came to fruition on my grandfather's rubber plantation in the heart of the Keralean backwaters.

Upon the many visits to Kerala my parents forced on me as a child, the majority of my memories include being viciously attacked by my relatives with wet, slobbery kisses, their laughter at my horribly mangled Malayalam (which I mistook for derision), and extreme boredom at being stuck at one of many houses in the middle of the city of Trivandrum. I was a virtual prisoner, mosquito-plagued, not being able to venture out of the house unsupervised for fear of being run over by an auto-rickshaw, or contracting dysentery by eating some forbidden food. My only solace was the many pirated copies of American and Malayali movies. Ironically, these seemingly mindless hours spent watching movies (and reading Tintin comics) may have influenced my filmmaking sentiments greater than I have realized.

But once a week in those interminable summer month visits, my parents took me to see my grandfather in Pala. Pala was a treasure trove of sensory riches; I do not recall ever seeing greener greens, smelling sweeter jasmine, or eating tastier food. The sound of the babbling brooks and chirping birds enveloped me in a kind of restorative cocoon. While the city sapped me of my



youthful exuberance and sense of adventure, Pala almost instantaneously restored them. As an added bonus, Pala was devoid of mosquitoes.

It is certainly not a stretch to want to combine these two loves. There are two things that always get my proverbial juices flowing: the making of a film, and the visual beauty of Kerala. In fact, before I even made the decision to attend film school, the decision to shoot a film in Kerala had long been made.

Back in the 2006 Fall Semester, when many of my ideas came up short, (one of my pitches was described “boring and trite” while another was “just dumb”— I’ll always prefer “dumb”) I started to question my abilities in the creative fields. Maybe I made a huge mistake—was it too late to go back to med school? However, after a little soul-searching, I realized that the problem wasn’t my lack of creativity but my lack of inspiration. At that point in my fledging film career, the only thing that I wanted to write about was Kerala, specifically, my sensorial wonderment.

Recent travels to Pala proved to be key in forming the story. As mentioned before, Pala had always been a shrine to nature’s beauty. To get to my grandfather’s villa, situated at the top of a large hill, you had to take a long and winding dirt road. Even though the journey was a bit long and arduous, I defy anyone who’s ever taken it not to feel more energized upon its completion than at its start. But when I last visited Pala, modernization had reared its ugly head. The road was now paved, and vehicular traffic had increased. The sounds of the babbling brook were absent as someone had built a house over it. The sounds of the warbling birds were replaced with the jarring cacophony of car

horns, revving engines, and screeching tires on pavement. Electrical wires crisscrossed, obscuring the view of the verdant horizon. The Pala that I loved was gone. As such, I felt personally affronted by the new developments. Certainly, everybody who lived on the land enthusiastically embraced it without question. My biases against the eyesores and the noise compelled me to look at such enthusiasm with cynical eyes. The seeds for Light were born.

I am not the Unabomber. Anyway, he has already been caught, and I am no genius (not even a mad genius). I am not anti-technology and differ from my grandfather in that I favor progression. But I don't think that technology necessarily makes the world a better place. I undoubtedly enjoy the benefits of the cell phone, the internet, and television. But the negative effects of these society-changing tools are as visible as the positives, perhaps more so. Light's theme is that technology is dangerous when it's implemented too quickly without regard to its destructive possibilities.

In CCC one of my assignments included a plot synopsis based on one of Michelle Benoit's documentaries. We had to create a fiction adaptation, and in my version, there was a character who grows up in a small town, becomes a doctor, and returns to set up a practice. While the plot itself might be forgettable, the idea of the prodigal son returning after experiencing life in the big city was rather appealing. I felt that there was quite a lot of drama that could be mined from such a situation. It wasn't very hard to apply that to my Kerala project. Instead of being a doctor this time, Ramu, the protagonist, would be an engineer who brings his knowledge of electrical engineering back home with him. In

writing the plot outline, it was pretty clear that I was trying to squeeze a two-hour movie into 10 minutes. The mantra “under 10 minutes” was constantly drilled into my head in most of the creative writing classes taken over the semesters, and I succeeded in writing the first draft in about 10 pages. The basic structure was as follows: Ramu introduces electricity to his village and implements it quickly, the villagers are very receptive at first but drastic problems arrive, the villagers reject the new technology, the people Ramu care about are hurt, and Ramu is left devastated. In this first draft, I had quite a few secondary characters including a sister of the female love interest, Lakshmi, of whom the boy (Vikesh) was the son. The problems the villagers face include the firing of the rubber workers, the death of a cow, and the death of Vikesh, Lakshmi’s nephew. As Ramu tries to calm the villagers down at a town meeting, news arrives that Lakshmi’s house is on fire (an electrical fire). Ramu rushes over, but it is too late, Lakshmi dies from her injuries. As Ramu leaves the village, he talks to the worker, Kumar, and comments on how he messed everything up. I felt satisfied with the script and shelved it as Spring ’07 approached.

## Chapter III: Pre-production

*Hit the Ground Running—My Script: Not So Much—I Bleed 70mm film—  
Communists and Moonshine—Rehearsal-Shmearsal—What's a Boom Mike? —  
Snoring Grandmothers*

### **My Department Heads**

Hopping on that plane, all I had with me was my script (one that had been lingering in my desk drawer for many months) and a vague idea of the film that I wanted to make. While this project had been set in motion for well over a year, the practicality of it all finally hit me. I had some hazy notions that certain of my relatives knew people who knew people in the film industry, but that was about it. I was determined that I would figure it out when I was there. Trying to do any of it over the phone in America was well nigh impossible. The plan was to hit the ground running and largely wing it.

And hit the ground running was precisely what I did. As soon as I got off the plane (at 4am), my uncle, P. Madhava Kaimal picked me up from the airport and told me I had a meeting with one of his friends from his club, a successful Malayali film director, Viji Thampi. Later that day and severely jet-lagged, I met with him and four of his crew members, Sujith Vasudev, DP; Anzar Khan, AD; Saburam, Art Director; and Roji Roberts, translator. I pitched them my idea; Anzar and Sabu didn't speak any English, Sujith and Mr. Thampi couldn't understand my American accent, but Roji spoke excellent English and I quickly realized that he would be, perhaps, the most important person for my ability to actually direct the film. The script I presented them was in English, which Roji took to translating almost immediately. Malayalam is a language that I have

familiarity with but no fluency in whatsoever. In essence, I can understand it fine, but I can't really communicate in it. Roji was saving me in more ways than one.

The department heads were all guys that were around my age (if just a few years older—early 30's) and were veterans of the Kerala film industry. As there are not very many film schools in India, these guys would start out in the business as young men in their early 20's and work their way up in various apprenticeships. Whenever a director like Viji Thampi would shoot a feature they would be at a more mid-level position, but if he shot something on a smaller scale like a commercial, they would be the principals. While they were veterans of a fashion, they were still up-and-comers. As such, they would make their own short films in their spare time on a variety of formats, both film and digital. They were perfect for my purposes—professionals who would bring their expertise to my film while not being averse to the format. What they would be getting in return was an opportunity to work with a “Western” director who had a certain knowledge of the workings of American film production and who would be distributing that film in America. Also, they were getting paid a little higher than their usual rate.

### **The Rewrite**

A few days later, the script was translated and all these main department heads had read it (Mr. Thampi's job was done and he went off to shoot his own film). The first thing the crew heads told me was that the script was too long, burning down a house would be too expensive, and that they didn't really care about any of the characters. I could deal with the script length and already knew

that the fire at the end wasn't feasible. In fact, the fire at the end was a bit ludicrous story-wise since in the span of just a few pages I had people getting fired, a cow getting electrocuted, and a boy dying. But what was really worrisome was my crew's indifference to the story. It might be one thing to write a self-indulgent script with student filmmakers, the stakes not being high. But when one has the privilege of using seasoned professionals, such a script just isn't going to cut it.

I set about condensing the script and trying to find a way to make the impact a little more apparent. Looking at the script months later, in a foreign country, (and with fresh criticism by people you want to make a good impression on) is a very good way to get creative inspiration. This spur of the moment re-writing was easily the most fluid, natural event to occur in any of my creative endeavors. I found that simple is almost always better and less is most definitely more. I eliminated Lakshmi's sister, made the boy, Vikesh, Lakshmi's son, eliminated the melodramatic fire at the end, and made the climatic event the death of Vikesh. These minor changes made a world of difference. The new script was well received by the heads, and they told me that they could finally see the story I was trying to tell. The changes made the story a lot better, and made the film a lot easier to shoot. The easy part was over.

### **The Format**

The hardest decision I had to make with regards to this film was choosing the format to shoot in. Coming in to India, I was under the impression that

shooting in film would be relatively cheap. My plans actually included shooting in 35mm. The good news was that shooting in film would more or less be the same whatever the size of film. That meant shooting in 16mm would be the same as 35mm in terms of cost. That also meant that I could shoot the thing in 70mm. The bad news was that shooting in film was going to be exorbitantly expensive. The initial estimates I got for shooting in film were somewhere in the \$30,000 range. If I shot without a digital intermediate, I could save a few thousand dollars. Yet, it was very hard to let go of the idea that I could shoot the film 70mm—it seemed like an opportunity of a lifetime. However, in the end, I chose to shoot in DV. I simply felt that the project didn't warrant that kind of huge expense, plus where was I going to exhibit a 70mm print? The film would invariably be exhibited and distributed on DVD or miniDV anyway. I'm of the firm belief that the most important aspect of professional looking films is lighting; and I was quickly forming the opinion that my DP was excellent. So one agonizing decision was over, but the real agony was to ensue.

### **Location Scouting**

Location scouting is rarely a pleasant experience, and the scouting for this was not to be an exception. The script called for a village that had no electricity and to my horror, the crew informed me that no such location existed in Kerala. I'd made the assumption that such locations still existed in India; after all, ten years prior, Pala was just such a location. But apparently, ten years is all that's

needed to transform an entire Indian province and bring it uniformly to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The village that existed in my script only existed there and in my mind.

So in setting out on our journey (DP, AD, Art Director, Location Manager), we had to at least find a village that was as close as possible. The old style Keralean architecture had a distinct look with clay tiled houses and rich teak paneling. Our first few days had us search the southern foothills of the Western Ghat Mountains, but we found nothing. We even ventured into the neighboring state of Tamil Nadu to search the other side of the mountains. A few locations were promising, some of the mountain-scapes that would be in the background were breathtaking, but most of the areas were strewn with garbage and filth. Plainly speaking, the entire state of Tamil Nadu had an oppressive odor—one that I couldn't abide. I was patently disgusted, perhaps it was my Western sensibilities or my clear wish to shoot the film in Kerala, but I rejected every possible location presented to me. Traveling back to our base city of Trivandrum, my crew, while hardly mutinous, were clearly exasperated by my stubbornness. After three days of hard searching in a sweaty, non-AC jeep, we were quickly running out of locations. My art director wanted to build a set, but I quickly nixed the idea because of the very high cost. Our last hope was the high mountain region north of us in the middle of the state—the region of Palakkad.

The ride up was through very bumpy, rugged terrain; though tired, I wasn't able to get any rest due to the constant jostling of jeep. After 10 long hours, our reward was a dingy, cockroach infested roadside motel, but my crew never complained so neither could I (this entire trek was entirely my fault). The next



morning, the Communist Party of Kerala called a statewide strike (the reasons for it escape me); strikes are a common occurrence in Kerala and when they say strike, they mean a complete stoppage of everything. People have to stay in their homes, no buses or trains run, no cars or trucks on the street, nothing. The Communist Party apparently didn't know that I had a location to find and that time was definitely against us. My location manager came up with the idea of posting a notice on our car informing everyone that we had to attend a funeral. The notice said one word, "Death!" We made it through several Communist checkpoints. But finally, one local Communist leader didn't buy our story. He asked us lots of detailed questions, and before I could understand what was going on, we had about twenty young commie thugs surrounding our car with a variety of weapons ranging from machetes, to sticks, to cricket bats. Horrible scenarios went through my mind all involving them taking their anger out on the non-Malayalam speaking Western imperialist whose lackeys were chauffeuring him around Palakkad. Fortunately for all of us, my location manager was a very smooth talker; he came clean about our true intentions, but we mercifully weren't pummeled. We were, though, arrested.

They didn't have a jail so we got to sit under the shade of a banyan tree while the leader figured out what to do with us. After a couple more hours of smooth talking from my DP and with no idea of what to do with us, the leader let us go with a stern warning to get off the road as soon as possible.

Later that night, at a roadside restaurant, we dined under a kerosene lamp. I talked with my DP about how I wanted the bedroom scene between my

leads to look, and we had a lengthy discussion of the various aspects of light would affect the theme of the movie. The bonding process with my crew was in full effect. After all, it's hard not to bond after spending nearly a week in such cramped proximity and getting detained by Communists. The week before, I constantly ate my own packaged food and refused to share in their meals (they didn't seem to understand that Delhi Belly was not what I needed at the time). But that night when they offered the food, I happily partook. After the week of agony we went through, a little indigestion could hardly faze me. My AD bought us rounds of toddy, a Kerala moonshine made from fermented coconut water; and we kept discussing the film through their broken English and my broken Malayalam, all under the haziness the moonshine brought. But they finally understood the look I was trying to achieve, and all the pieces of our collective puzzle finally fit together.

We were on the last day of our location scout, but this time my location manager was on the same page as I. He led us to a place called Pothandy Dam, and it was as close to perfect as possible. The majestic beauty of the Western Ghats was pervasive; the houses looked right, the electrical wires weren't oppressive, and the village junction was as close to a village square as I could have imagined. The week's events had brought me as far down as I thought I could go; but that was all over when I finally had my location. The roads were paved, but the art director said that we could cover it all up in dirt. Light's existence was rapidly becoming a reality.

## **Casting**

Casting the film was going to be a different process from the one that I'd become familiar with at UNO. There was no such thing as a casting call for the actors in Kerala. Theatrical acting is a completely different beast than film acting there, and since I was making a short film, getting film actors was going to prove somewhat difficult. I was completely reliant on my department heads to find suitable actors for the project. In the end, my casting call was being handed a very short list of names and the times they would appear on television on their respective serials. Feature film actors would be very hard to come by and very expensive; but good serial actors could be found for reasonable prices. After spending roughly a week perusing the Kerala airwaves, I found my two leads, Sajan Samuel for Ramu, and an actress named Shobana for Lakshmi. I wanted to set up a week for rehearsal, but this was scoffed at. Rehearsal is not something actors do there, and besides, their schedules would not allow it. I was just lucky that they were available to shoot on the days that we scheduled. However, a meeting could be arranged with them and when I met the very friendly Sajan, I was relieved to find out that he spoke exemplary English (as good as my translator Roji). Shobana had to suddenly drop out due to contracting pink eye and had to be replaced with a model named Priya, who spoke no English and had very little acting experience. But she looked the part, and I had no choice at that point anyway. The rest of the actors were to be picked out by my AD, Anzar, and my DP, Sujith, who were doubling as my

casting directors. My only instructions to them were to get the best actors who could fit our schedule.

## **Budget**

With DV chosen as the format, much of the expense of film had been drastically brought down. But this wasn't like shooting a short in the comforts of UNO. Everything that was going into the film was coming out of pocket. All equipment had to be rented and food, transport, lodging, and set design had to be paid for. For a couple weeks the budget kept increasing from a starting point of \$7000 to \$15,000. In the end, my original five-day shoot was going to be instead three days and the final budget would be \$10,000. This budget was going to be factor of everything that was put into the film, from my departure from America to my arrival with a finished product.

## **Sound**

The one thing that was conspicuously missing from the budget was sound. Sync sound (or "on set dubbing" as they called it) is not something the industry in India uses. All sound for the film was to be added in post-production.

So with the week leading up to shooting I starting making storyboards and compiling a shot list while my AD put together a schedule. One thing I learned from Circulation was to be as economical with the number of shots as possible, and I kept the number under forty. Scenes that didn't require a special time of

day were moved around from daylight to night and vice versa. Since we were shooting in three days, my AD and I just tried to make everything fit. The first two days would be at Pothandy Dam and include parts of Scene 1, Scene 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9. The last day would be at the rubber factory location (the rest of Scene 1, Scene 3 and 5) and the bedroom location (Scene 4). We decided to break up Scene 1 for different days because the complicated opening shots would benefit from the picturesque Pothandy location. Three days before shooting, my art director and unit production manager left to build and dress set pieces and get permission from the district to shoot, respectively. I joined them two days later after a long train ride into the mountains, my thoughts of the shoot occasionally disturbed by the snoring grandmother sharing my compartment.

## Chapter IV: Production

*Awesome Shots Take Too Long—My DP Almost Dies—The Crane is My Hero—The Cow Must Be Shot—Where is My Art Director?—We are in the Zone*

The day before the shoot I surveyed the rubber factory location and found it quite satisfactory. Then, my art director ferreted me to the village location; he dressed the set nicely, making it look even more authentic. What really astounded me was the teashop that he built from scratch. One of the problems with location initially was that all of the buildings were on one side of the junction while the other side was completely barren. My art director didn't speak any English, but he kept repeating one word to me constantly, "Balance." His plans to balance the frame were to build the shop that's included in the script. The logistics of that particular scene that takes place in the shop troubled me once the location was locked; the only possible solution available to us was to create a shop. In essence, we were killing two birds with one stone. With modernization entwining itself in almost all walks of Keralean life, I felt that my art director did a very good job in creating the rustic physical world of my script.

As the day went by, I made slight modifications to my storyboards and went over my shot list in detail as members of the cast and crew trickled into the Hotel Diana, our lodging for the shoot.

All of the equipment for the shoot was rented from a couple of rental houses located in the city of Cochin (Trivandrum was too far away). The camera equipment was rented from one house (Sony DV camera, lens, dollies, tripods, and crane). Everything else was from another house, the most important being a couple of grip trucks (actually grip "buses") that provided massive generators.

I met all of the actors that would round out the cast, most notably Ajay, who'd be playing the boy and Nistar, who'd be playing Kumaran (formerly named Chacko). Ajay was a nice kid who had big hair fashioned in a modern style. I asked him if we could cut it and he, being a seasoned professional, acceded graciously. Nistar was a swarthy, imposing figure who was sweeter than anyone I've ever met. At first, I figured him for some sort of gangster, but quickly after meeting him I realized that the man probably wouldn't even harm a fly. Everyone was in good spirits, even if not all knew what the hell the film was about. Surely, some of them may not have known what a short film was. But I was ready, confident, and, to my surprise, not even a little nervous.

### **Day One: Scenes 1, 5, 9**

The opening shot was crucial in conveying a sense of the beauty of the setting. The audience had to be hooked from the get-go and enveloped in the world the characters inhabited. One of the first things I asked my DP was whether or not I could get access to a crane and when he said yes, I immediately conceived of the opening shot of a wide-open expanse of mountains and paddy fields closing in on Vikesh. That morning while the rest of the crew was setting up in our main location of the village junction (where one of the tasks was spreading truckloads of dirt all over the road), my DP and I set about finding the right location. After a bit of driving, we found an ideal location. Of course, where we set the crane depended on finding some solid ground in the paddy field. There was only one spot in the vast fields that would work, and we quickly called

in the camera crew, actors, and grips. Vikesh arrived wearing his brand new costume (I told him to roll around in the dirt), and the camera crew went to work setting up the crane. One of the perks of being a director in India (even on a short film like this) was that the director is treated like a king. I was assigned an assistant who catered to my every need—he brought out a chair for me and held a large umbrella for shade. I felt a little uncomfortable with this arrangement, but it hardly mattered as I was on my feet for most of the shoot.

After a couple of rehearsals for the boy's and Sujith's sake (doubling as camera operator), we rolled. On the first take, I saw a flock of birds swarm into the shot as the camera descended on a running Vikesh. I could hardly contain my glee—it felt like a good omen. The shot was perfect, but I asked Sujith if he wanted another take. He said yes, and I let him shoot another one even though I knew that the first take would absolutely be used. After all the time that it took to set that shot up, it didn't hurt to get another take.

As great as that first shot was, we ended up burning about two hours from our schedule. The next shots were going to be Vikesh running down a mountain, running through the woods, and finally the insert of the plane in his hand. These amounted to two different locations, and while they were nearby, the involved company moves. For the mountain shot, just a few people including Sujith, the 1<sup>st</sup> AC, Ajay, his handler, and I were needed. While the rest of the crew was setting up the dolly for the other shots, we quickly had a couple takes with Ajay running down the hill. The poor guy complained about having to run barefoot



down the hill; but I kept repeating, “Just one more take.” He had to make due with the high-five I gave as we walked down the mountain.

We then shot Ajay running through the woods and the insert. For the insert, we put Ajay on the dolly and put the camera as low as possible to shoot up at his hand. The shot took longer than I wanted because the motion of the plane was very static. It was many takes before I found the motion that worked. With the rest of Scene 1 set for Day 3, we were finally ready to shoot Scene 5. Unfortunately, we were already into the afternoon. Day shoots in India last from 7am and end at 9:30pm. Any longer than that, I would have to pay another half days wages to *everyone* involved. And on top of all this, we had to break for lunch.

Scene 5 got off to a great start. The first shots covered the scene where Ramu turns the light on for the shopkeeper in front of a the jubilant crowd. This was the first of many shots that had many actors and extras in them. The method involved me talking directly to Sajan in English while I conveyed my instructions for everyone else to Roji who served as the 2<sup>nd</sup> AD. While I might not have been able to communicate in Malayalam, I could certainly understand it; so judging the performances wasn't difficult. Also, we were going to dub everything later anyway so inflection didn't really matter while shooting. The one thing I realized was that coverage is not a term with which the crew was very familiar. That was fine with me due to the time constraints and the fact that I knew exactly what I wanted and needed with respect to the shots.

We made our way to the shots of Ramu and Kumar with the coconut vendor. The sun was starting to set and the light was changing rapidly so my AD told me that we had to tack the rest of the Scene 5 shots to Day 2 and move on to setting up for Scene 9.

The first shot of Scene 9 included another crane shot that introduced the action. While the camera crew set up the crane, the electricians set up the wiring for our makeshift street lamp. Again, Sabu did a masterful job in creating the working props. While setting everything up, we encountered an unpleasant surprise. Apparently, a wedding was taking place nearby, and we had to suffer through an onslaught of traffic for the rest of the night. If we just had to deal with the camera and tripod, this wouldn't have been too much of a problem. But after the crane shot, we had a complicated dolly shot that ends the film. Also, we didn't have very much time to shoot the whole scene (just a couple hours at most).

The first shots went smoothly for the most part; but we had a traffic build up behind us, and the motorists were starting to get irate. We quickly packed up the crane and moved on to the rest of the scene. Sajan was a great actor, and we worked well together in a very seamless fashion. He needed few takes and could practically read my mind when I needed to give him direction. Needless to say, shots with Sajan went by relatively quickly. We set up the dolly for the last shot but had only half an hour to shoot before the 9:30 deadline. I was in a state of complete agitation because we kept getting unwanted bystanders in the background (due to the wedding). Regrettably, in between takes, I cursed like a

sailor as take after take was lacking in some regard. The dolly came off the tracks on one of the takes and Sujith, who sitting pretty high up, came very close to being seriously injured. After making sure that he and the rest of the camera crew was alright, I called a wrap for the day. We only had a few minutes left anyway, and I decided that I would have to make do with what we got. Despite the minor mishaps of the first day, I was in good spirits. The time crunch was due to the first shots taking too long, but I felt that they were completely worth it—I was still buzzing over that opening shot.

### **Day Two: Scenes 5, 8, 6, and 2**

With the exception of Scene 6, all shots this day were going to take place at the village junction. I was moderately confident that we could shoot everything on time even with the added shots from Scene 5.

The first shots of the day were the rest of Scene 5. Everything went well, even a complicated shot with everyone in the village running towards the event that takes place in Scene 6. The shot had a variety of people starting at different times from a variety of positions. We also had a bullock cart thrown in the mix. Anzar, the AD, handled the choreography of the shot with expert precision.

Scene 8 was up next and, again, included a large group of extras in addition to all of my principal actors. A crane shot and a dolly shot were thrown into the mix which caused another traffic problem. Since we were leaving the location for Day 3, it was imperative that I get all of the shots that day. The plan was to finish everything in Scene 8 before the sun started to set so that we could

move on to Scene 6 (which was to be shot in the same location as the plane-in-hand insert).

I had a lot of trepidation about Scene 6 since it dealt with a live cow (playing a dead one). Sabu was in charge of arranging the cow to be on set as well as a veterinarian to come and sedate the animal. He informed me that there was a very specific window for when this could be done. But we had to finish Scene 8 because once we got back to the village junction, we had to set up for Scene 2, which also had a lot of extras and practical electrical concerns.

We arrived at the location with Sabu and Anzar ahead of the rest of the crew. The sun was starting to set by then, and Anzar told me that we were losing valuable setup time for Scene 2. But the cow and doctor were already there and ready to go. The doctor injected the cow with something, shook my hand, and then promptly left. Before I had a chance to inquire where he was leaving, the crew arrived and started setting up (this time the crane was on *top* of the dolly). By the time the sun set, the cow was on the ground, and the crowd of actors and extras were ready to go. When I called action, the crowd ran down the dirt path toward the cow—at which point, the cow jumped straight up, scared out of its mind. I asked Sabu if the doctor actually injected the cow with tranquillizer and not water, to which Sabu simply shrugged his shoulders. I then asked him where the doctor was. Another shrug. We were losing light very fast, and Sujith was not happy. After some hard coaxing and maneuvering, we got the cow down on the ground again and proceeded with another take. Same reaction from the cow. Sujith's agitation was slowly to creep over to me. I wondered what the

ramifications would be if I killed a cow in front of an overwhelmingly Hindu crowd. Third take. Same reaction, this time stronger. We only had scant minutes left so I scrapped the shot and told Sujith to take the camera off and shoot inserts of various members of the crowd. I informed the crowd (through Roji, of course) to play the scene out while Sujith shot everyone with the camera mounted on his shoulder.

Scene 9 had a lot of extras, but by now, handling a large group of people was almost second nature. The crew was working like a well-oiled machine, the crane didn't seem to take a lot of time to set up anymore, and we ended with ten minutes to spare. Sujith really enjoyed the run-and-gun style of shooting we did in Scene 6, so I let him do so with the spare minutes we had.

As for the cow, Sabu later told me that it fell asleep as soon as we left and couldn't be woken for two days.

### **Day Three: Scenes 3, 7,1, and 4**

We made it out to the rubber plantation location in the morning with two conspicuous absences, Sabu and Anzar. Anzar was out with a splitting headache, but the actual village residents of the Pothandy location, evidently, arrested Sabu, the night before. While Sabu did a magnificent job of dressing the set, he made no provisions for restoring the location to its original condition. So I had to go into the last day without my art director or AD. Nevertheless, the last turned out to be my favorite day. The scenes were not all that complicated, and everyone pitched in with the set decoration. The crew worked as a cohesive

whole in a true spirit of collaboration. The set was generally relaxed, and everyone had a great time.

That last day gave me time to reflect on my experiences in shooting this film. I can say with the utmost certainty that this film would not have been possible if it wasn't for the professionalism of my entire crew. The film could have been made with a student crew, but not in three days and not to such scale or production value. Certain things were a lot different from my experiences in America. Shooting without a boom mike felt disconcerting, but it had its advantages. On one hand, the pressures of eliciting the "perfect" emotional response from my actors were gone. I found myself watching facial expressions rather than listening to intonation. Also, even though we were shooting on digital, everyone on the crew was used to just a couple takes. This felt strange because after the amount of time it took to set up a shot, it made sense to get a couple more takes. In India, the blueprint is followed very faithfully. Every since my first student film, I never followed any of my plans rigidly and always allowed a certain degree of breathing room while directing. Over here, the director was king. I certainly liked the authority, but even then, the pressures were that much higher. If mistakes were made, the consequences would be that much graver. That's why the last day of shooting was more comfortable for me. It was what I was used to. And having Sujith on the same wavelength made everything that much easier. All in all, I felt incredibly blessed to have had such an experience so early in my film career.

So, we wrapped at the bedroom scene location; I gave someone money to bail Sabu out; and by the morning, everyone had left. Now one question remained: How's this all going to cut together?

## Chapter V: Post Production

### **Editing**

Going into shooting I knew what shots I needed and where they would go. Editing in this regard was uncomplicated and took only two days. While Circulation as a story took weeks to find in the editing room, Light's story was very clear in the rough cut. All the shots fit perfectly together like an elaborate puzzle. My main concern was with the transitions between scenes, but my fears were unwarranted.

### **Dubbing and Foley**

Since we didn't shoot sync sound, everything had to be done at a studio. Fortunately, our camera had a mike on it that provided us a scratch track. Of all my actors, only Sajan's voice was his own. Anzar arranged for the all the dubbing artists, who were excellent. They spoke good English and took direction well. One guy who had a sort of bag of tricks did all the sound effects. He provided everything I could ask for.

### **Music**

After the dubbing and foley work were finished, Anzar and Sujith presented me with a composer named Vishwajith. He responded very enthusiastically to the movie and told me that he grew up in a village just like the one in Light. He remembered the first time they got electricity although the



results were much better. We discussed the themes of the film, and he really understood what I was going for. Music in film was the one thing with which I have very little experience. I just know if it works or not after the fact. One week later, Vishwajith had the score ready and it worked.

### **Finishing Up**

Mixing the sound elements and music took a couple days. Roji and I spent one day laying in subtitles, going over each line repeatedly to get the translation right for audiences outside of Kerala. The film was going to be screened to an audience of around 50 people including members of my family and the Trivandrum society. As we were making the final DVD copy, I was struck severely ill with the bacterial disease campylobacter. I missed the screening and subsequently my flight out. I spent the week recovering in the hospital as I waited for the next flight out. After eating the food for months, Delhi Belly finally caught up with me (thankfully at the end of it all). As far as sendoffs go, this one seemed appropriate enough.

## Conclusion

Light was, by no means, a cheap film to make. Annie cost me a few hundred dollars, and I spent no money on Circulation. Shooting in India with a professional crew and actors in a distant mountainous location with art department costs and equipment rentals ends up costing a significant amount of money. But what I got in return is invaluable. It was an experience of a lifetime and one that I can always look back on, whatever the future may hold for me.

My goal for film school has been to learn both the logistic and creative aspects of film directing and apply all that I learned to my thesis film. I am happy to say that I believe I've fulfilled that goal. My experiences with this film and those in UNO can be summed up as: in order to be a successful director you need to be flexible, open-minded, and as egoless as possible. Having a clear vision and idea of the story you're telling are necessary, of course, but I feel the other things that are often highly valued in a director, such as great communication skills or technological knowledge, aren't all that necessary. The success of a film hinges on the how good are the people you work with. And for a cast and crew to make a good product, they have to work well together. The director is ultimately the nexus point of this all-important spirit of collaboration. If you hire a good actor and let them in on the vision you have, you can let them find the performance on their own. If you hire good technicians on set, you don't need to know what a scrim is; or even what lens to use. A good director knows what his limitations are and knows that in making a film not everything will go according to plan. It means loosening up on the reins from time to time. As long

as the story is not harmed, I've learned to accept whatever comes my way and use it to my advantage whenever I can. I know that letting go is sometimes the right choice. And I'm starting to know the kind of director I'm going to be. I'll always go into a project with a clear vision but that vision will never be set in stone. I'll hire good actors and trust them inherently. I'll hire a good crew, let them do their job, and let them come up with their own creative ideas. And finally, I'll always know that I won't always have all the answers. And that's okay. Somebody on set will.

## **Appendix A: Shooting Script**

FADE IN.

EXT. RUBBER FACTORY - DAY

Bluebottle flies hum idly as sharp sunlight illuminates the green covering the ground.

RAMU (V.O.)

For years, this village has  
been left in darkness while  
the world around it has  
grown.

Wild creepers stretch across a dirt path leading past a small open air rubber factory. A BOY, 10, runs down the path holding up a small wooden airplane.

RAMU (V.O.)

Living in the city these many  
years, I made a vow that I  
would return to my  
birthplace...

Some MEN in the factory sift the rubber while others hang wet sheets on a clothesline. Shafts of light make the sweat of their dark skin glitter.

BOY

Uncle, aren't you coming to  
see it?

WORKER#1/KUMAR

We're finishing up. I'll  
meet you there.

The BOY continues down the dirt path as it meanders down a hill.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Hands connect cables.

RAMU (O.S.)

To give it light!

Crudely set up bulbs throughout the village turn on suddenly, bathing the village in warm, orangish light.

Villagers cheer and hoist a startled Ramu onto their shoulders. Reluctant at first, he starts to enjoy all of the attention.

Other villagers join the boy, as he comes across to the jubilant scene. He runs up to his mother, LAKSHMI, 25.

Ramu's satisfied grin evaporates as he sees Lakshmi.

RAMU

Lakshmi...

Lakshmi holds her son while staring back, her eyes trimmed with tears.

EXT. RUBBER FACTORY - DAY

Kumar and the other workers squint against the morning light as they approach the factory. Throbbing sounds of a machine break the silence.

A thin spindly BOSS, 40 meets them outside the entrance.

BOSS

Your new co-worker is inside waiting for you!

The workers quickly gather around the entrance clearly fascinated by the sound. Some enter the building. Kumar hangs back.

KUMAR

We don't need any help.  
We've been doing fine.

BOSS

Are you the boss now? Its not for you to decide if you need help. Did you think the

village's only gift was  
light?

One WORKER from inside runs up to Kumar.

WORKER#2

Kumar, come see! I think  
we're going name it Gunda!

KUMAR

Name it? It's a machine.  
It's not one of us.

BOSS

That's for sure.

INT. RAMU'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Ramu lights an oil lamp. He unbuttons his shirt. A  
knock on the door startles him.

Lakshmi opens it and enters quickly.

RAMU

Lakshmi, you shouldn't be...

LAKSHMI

Why did you come back?

RAMU

You know why.

LAKSHMI

For your precious light, I  
know! But what about me?

RAMU

Lakshmi...

LAKSHMI

You left. You were gone.  
You said you'd never come  
back to this backward  
little...

RAMU

I was young. I was wrong.

Ramu slowly approaches her.

RAMU

The boy?

Lakshmi closes her eyes.

LAKSHMI

I let you go. I made my  
peace.

RAMU

And the father?

LAKSHMI

He died many years ago.

Their shadows dance on the walls as they move closer.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DUSK

A lone bulb lights up. Villagers cheer.

Ramu is standing outside a small shop manned by a SHOP  
OWNER, 60.

OLD MAN

May God bless you! You are  
saving the village.

Ramu smiles. The villagers start to crowd around him.

VILLAGER #1

Please, bring the light to my  
home!

VILLAGER #2

Your home can wait, my shop  
needs it next.

VILLAGER #3

We must first put in the  
school!

RAMU

Please, please. Everyone  
will get the current in due  
time.



KUMAR approaches.

KUMAR

Clear out everyone! Give the  
man some space!

The villagers start to disperse.

Ramu wipes sweat off his brow. He gives Kumar a wane  
smile.

KUMAR

Long day? You look tired.

RAMU

And thirsty. In the city,  
they have machines that can  
keep drinks cold. Soon  
enough, we can bring them  
here.

KUMAR laughs as grabs a coconut from the shop owner's  
counter. He takes a machete, cuts the top of the  
coconut off, and presents it to Ramu.

KUMAR

Can you get something as  
refreshing from your city?

Ramu chuckles and drinks from the coconut.

Finished, he glances at Lakshmi, walking in the  
distance with Vikesh.

She looks at Ramu and smiles discreetly at him. Kumar  
looks at the two of them. Lakshmi quickly looks away.

Villagers start to quickly run out of the village as  
commotion builds. Ramu et al. follow everyone out.

EXT. PATH LEADING TO VILLAGE - DUSK

Vikesh leads the group including Lakshmi, Kumar, and  
Ramu through the crowd. They come across a dead cow  
next to some fallen, sparking wires.

Vikesh, clearly enthralled, tries to get closer to the  
cow but is quickly pulled back by his mother.

A murmur starts to spread through the crowd who all start to stare at Ramu.

EXT. RUBBER FACTORY - DAY

Kumar and the other workers approach the factory. The sound of the one machine has been supplanted with the sounds of many.

The workers look at each other confused.

The Boss meets them.

KUMAR

What's going on?

BOSS

With all the success we had with our first machine, we have decided to use more.

KUMAR

But what about our jobs?

BOSS

Yes... Well, you are no longer needed. Thank you.

KUMAR

But...

BOSS

I said thank you.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Ramu is enveloped by a throng of villagers.

VILLAGER #1

Our animals are getting killed by your electricity!

WORKER#2

We have been fired from our jobs!

RAMU

But think of what we can gain  
in time.

VILLAGER #2

What have I gained? My cow  
is dead!

RAMU

We must not let this village  
disappear into obscurity. To  
die in the dark.

LAKSHMI

So shall we die in your  
light?

Lakshmi approaches Ramu from behind. Ramu turns  
suddenly. He pauses. Then he turns to the crowd.

RAMU

I know that there have been  
problems, but if we want  
progress we must deal with  
some growing pains.

LAKSHMI

Growing pains? How is my  
brother going to feed us? Can  
my son eat the light?

Ramu is stricken.

RAMU

I never meant for any of this  
to happen. Kumar getting  
fired... any of it.

LAKSHMI

No one ever does.

RAMU

I only wanted to help. All I  
wanted was to make you proud.

Lakshmi turns her back on him, eyes welling with  
tears.

LAKSHMI

All I wanted was for you to  
stay. But we were never good  
enough for you. And now  
you've ruined everything.

Commotion builds in the background. Lakshmi and Ramu  
search for the source. The crescendo of noise breaks  
with Lakshmi's piercing scream.

Kumar carries Vikesh's corpse to the middle of the  
village square. Lakshmi continues to scream  
inconsolably.

KUMAR

Found his body on the path.  
Another fallen wire...

Kumar is too winded to speak.

Lakshmi carries Vikesh away with the help of a couple  
villagers.

Ramu looks helplessly on. Kumar makes his way through  
of some of the crowd. A moment of silence. Kumar  
thrusts something at Ramu's chest.

Kumar turns around and he and the rest of villagers  
follows after Lakshmi

Ramu looks down at this hands. Its Vikesh's toy  
wooden airplane.

He stands in the village square alone.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

The villagers work together to dismantle the  
electrical wiring throughout the town square.

Ramu slowly walks down the middle of the street  
carrying a black suitcase. Ramu walks up to the small  
shop.

SHOP OWNER

So you're leaving today?

RAMU

Yes, I wanted to see the  
village one last time before  
I left.

He looks at the villagers working.

RAMU

I would say goodbye to them.  
But...

SHOP OWNER

I thought that your light  
would change everything for  
me. But in the end, I miss  
my oil lamp. I liked how  
everything would seem to  
dance.

Kumar looks at the ground.

SHOP OWNER

But I'm just an old man.  
Maybe they'll be ready for it  
one day. It will just take  
some time.

Ramu looks at a group of children playing with a ball.  
They are oblivious to the work going around them. He  
looks at the toy plane clutched in his hand.

A tear rolls down Ramu's cheek. He looks at Kumar.

RAMU

Yes, some time.

He walks past the last of the buildings into the thick  
foliage outside the village.

The shop owner's light bulb slowly dims.

FADE OUT.

## Appendix B: Shot List

## Shot List

### Scene 1

1A WS→MS—CRANE shot of mountain scape→ tree lines → road as Vikesh runs by

1B CU—INSERT—plane in hand; trees in the background

1C WS—DOLLY around as Vikesh meets Kumar; runs out of frame at the end of the scene

1D CU—Vikesh—high angle (Demme style)

1E CU – Kumar – low angle (Demme style)

1F MS – CRANE as Vikesh runs down hill; camera follows behind

### Scene 2

2A CU – Ramu’s hands connect cables

2B WS – wide view of the village with Ramu towards center of shot; lights go on at once

2C MS – DOLLY as Ramu lifted and carried by villagers

2D MS – Vikesh runs to Lakshmi

2E CU – Ramu sees Lakshmi

2F MS→MCU – Lakshmi holds Vikesh; tear in her eye

### Scene 3

3A WS→MCU – Kumar walks into position in frame; workers in background (morning light; workers leave frame as Kumar dialogue

3B WS – Boss; workers gather round the entrance

3C MCU – Boss on right side of frame; worker comes up into frame; worker runs back

3D WS→MS – INSERT – outside of building; machine sound from inside

### Scene 4

4A CU→MS→MCU→CU – camera in fixed position. Ramu lights oil lamp; PAN as we follow him to side of bed→ walks closer into frame to MCU→ walks into CU

4B MS→MCU→CU – same with Lakshmi

4C MS→MS – DOLLY past Ramu and Lakshmi to settle on their shadows

#### Scene 5

5A CU→WS – bulb lights up; DOLLY out to master shot of Ramu by shop; villagers surround him; later Ramu finishes coconut and sees Lakshmi and Vikesh walking; after murmur, villagers disperse, Ramu et al. follow

5B MS – villagers around Ramu by the stall; Kumar clears them out to settle at right side

5C MS – Ramu (R) and Kumar (L); Ramu sees Lakshmi; Kumar notices

5D MS – Lakshmi smiles discreetly

#### Scene 6

6A MS→WS→CU – CRANE -- Vikesh leads group through crowd→ side view of action→ over view as crowd disperses around dead cow→ camera PUNCHES IN to closer view of dead cow

6B MS – Vikesh tries to get closer; Lakshmi pulls him back

6C MS→WS – DOLLY – camera backs through crowd as they start to stare at Ramu

6D MS→CU – DOLLY – punch in on Ramu's reaction

#### Scene 7

7A MS – workers walk into frame; Kumar follows and settles into the frame

7B/C MS→CU – DOLLY back from factory; sounds of many machines

7D CU – Kumar (R)

#### Scene 8

8A WS – Master shot; Ramu surrounded by villagers

8B MS→MS – Ramu addresses villagers in front of him; DOLLY around after hearing Lakshmi; Ramu turns back to crowd; Later – Ramu and Lakshmi hear Lakshmi screams

8C CU – Ramu turns around “I didn't mean”



8D CU – Lakshmi

8E MS – Kumar brings Vikesh's corpse through crowd

8F WS – Lakshmi carries away Vikesh; followed by villagers

8FF MS – either DOLLY or separate shot – Kumar approaches Ramu and thrusts something at his chest; then follows Lakshmi

8G CU – Ramu reaction; looks at hands

8H CU – INSERT – wooden plane is in Ramu's hands

8I or 8A WS – Ramu stands alone in village

### Scene 9

9A WS – Ramu walks down street to shopowner's shop; villagers remove wires, lights, etc.; group of children play in middle of road

9B MS – shopowner (R) talks to Ramu; Ramu looks behind him

9C MS – Ramu talks to shopkeeper while activity goes on behind him

9D MS – children playing

9E CU – Ramu watches children; looks at hand; tear in his eye

9F MS→WS→MS Ramu starts to walk away; DOLLY back to reveal bulb; bulb turns off

9G MS – Shop Owner as Ramu leaves

## Appendix C: DVD copy of Light



## Vita

Kiren Kaimal was born April 25, 1978 in Cleveland, OH. After growing up in Alexandria, LA, he received his BA in English from Dartmouth College in 2000. While at Dartmouth, he served as a directorate member of the Dartmouth Film Society and editor of their film journal, Cahiers du Dartma. After studying for his masters in Pharmacology at Tulane University, he enrolled in the University of New Orleans in 2005 for a MFA in Film Production.